

The American Political System

Western Washington University

Winter 2022

Professor: Dr. Catherine Wineinger
Course Number: PLSC 250 (5 credits)
Class Time: M/W/F 11:30-12:50pm
Room: Environmental Studies (ES) 100

Office Location: Arntzen Hall (AH) 416
Office Hours: M/W/F 1:00-2:00pm or by appt.
Email: cathy.wineinger@wwu.edu
Department Phone: (360) 650-3469

Course Description

This course examines the American political system through the lens of democratic principles. Students will be introduced to the major questions, concepts, and theoretical frameworks in the subfield of American politics. While some of the challenges we are facing in the United States today are unprecedented, others are not. Our goal is to interrogate existing theories and apply them to current events in order to better understand our present political landscape. Together, we will discuss and evaluate the status of American democracy as well as the ways it could be improved.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the structures and functions of American government
- Understand and communicate political science theories used to explain American politics
- Apply political science theories to current political events
- Feel comfortable reading and comprehending scholarly research

Departmental Learning Objectives

- Possess substantive knowledge in their area of concentration (1)
- Demonstrate critical, independent thinking about politics and public life (5)
- Recognize the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of participating in, and contributing as a citizen in, a diverse society (6)
- Understand and evaluate assumptions, values, and beliefs in context of diverse local, national, and global communities (7)
- Convey substantive knowledge using reading and written and oral communication (8)

Required Readings

All required and recommended readings/assignments – including articles, book chapters, podcasts, etc. – will be **posted on Canvas** within the corresponding module.

Although we will not be using a textbook in this class, some students may find it helpful to engage with one as a refresher and/or to deepen their understanding of certain concepts discussed in class. I recommend using [American Government 3e](#) on OpenStax – it's free!

A Typical Day

- Daily Quiz & Announcements (~10 minutes)
- Lecture (~30 minutes)
- Free-Write (~10 minutes)
- Group/Class Discussion (~30 minutes)

Earning Your Grade

Daily Quizzes (x21).....	50%
“Hot Seat” Days (x4).....	20%
Final Project*.....	20%
Participation.....	10%

*You must submit a project proposal in order to receive a passing grade on your final project.

Scale

93-100	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
<60	F

Pass/No Pass Grades

Students opting for P/NP grading will receive a **P for grades of D- and above**. A grade of D, D-, or F will be recorded as an NP, which will not earn credits or be reflected in the GPA. In order to earn credits toward the **Political Science major or minor, a grade of C- or higher is required**.

Why Daily Quizzes? 🤔

Instead of a midterm or final exam, you will be taking daily quizzes on Canvas beginning in Week 3. Quizzes will consist of five questions pertaining to **that day’s assigned readings and the previous lecture**. These quizzes are open note and aren’t meant to trick you! If you read, pay attention in class, and take notes, you should do well. I will also **drop your five lowest scores**.

Research shows that frequent assessment can enhance student learning. For example, [one study](#) found that daily online quizzes closed achievement gaps between students and increased academic performance. Students who took online quizzes in one class also performed better in their *other* college classes. This suggests that regular assessment in introductory courses can help students develop better study habits, which benefits them in all courses.

Because your five lowest quiz scores will be dropped, **there will be no makeup quizzes** (except in the case of disability accommodations, religious observances, prolonged medical absences, etc. Please [click here](#) for a detailed description of university policies.)

Important Dates:

Fri., Jan. 7 – Class Survey & Hot Seat Signup Due	Mon., Jan. 17 – No Class – MLK Day
Fri., Feb. 11 – Project Proposal Due	Mon., Feb. 21 – No Class – Presidents Day
Fri., Mar. 11 – Final Project Due	Fri., Mar. 11 – No Class – Office Hours

Class Conduct and Expectations

In order for our class discussions to be meaningful and productive, it is essential that we treat one another with respect. This includes: recognizing that each person in this class is bringing with them unique life experiences and academic training; demonstrating self-awareness and a willingness to listen; and engaging in constructive critiques.

Attendance/Absences

A reminder: participation is 10% of your grade and you will be quizzed on lectures, so it is worthwhile for you to come to class each day! That said, we are still in the middle of a pandemic. **If you are feeling sick, please stay home** (remember that I will drop your 5 lowest quiz scores; if absences become an issue for you, please reach out to me so we can work something out!).

COVID-19 Safety Information for All WWU Students

Due to the ongoing risk of community spread of COVID-19, WWU students are reminded that **proper use of masks is required in all indoor spaces on campus and WWU transportation.** Your cooperation will play an important role in preventing COVID-19 transmission and keeping our classroom spaces open for face-to-face instruction. **You should stay home if you have any possible COVID-19 symptoms.** If you have symptoms and need to stay home, or if you are instructed to isolate due to a positive COVID-19 diagnosis or close contact with a diagnosed person, you should contact your instructor to make alternate arrangements for completing assigned class work, as you would for any illness or injury that prevents in-person participation in the class.

If you disregard this mandate (including anyone wearing a mask improperly) you are potentially putting your classmates at risk, which is against the expectations of the WWU Student Code of Conduct. If a faculty member identifies an unsafe situation in the class, they have the authority to tell any student contributing to the problem to change their unsafe behavior or, failing that, to leave the place where the class is taking place.

Office Hours/Contact Information

Office hours are for **you!** I want you to succeed (both in and beyond this class). If you have questions, would like to further discuss readings/assignments, or just want to talk about politics, career goals, etc., please feel free to stop by.

- **When:** M/W/F 1:00-2:00 p.m.
- **Where:** 1) In-person meetings: Arntzen Hall 416
2) Zoom meetings: Click the “Virtual Office Hours” link located at the top of the Modules page on Canvas

If you cannot meet during these hours, please email me at cathy.wineinger@wwu.edu to schedule an appointment. I only read and reply to emails during regular business hours. Give me one full business day to respond to your email, but don't be afraid to follow up after that!

WWU Policies and Student Resources

Please visit syllabi.wwu.edu for a list of university policies and resources, including: plagiarism and academic integrity policies, disability resources, religious accommodation policies, etc.

A Note on COVID-19, Productivity, and Self-Care

Nothing is more important than taking good care of yourself! I expect you to give your best effort in class, but I will also work to be flexible and accommodating (and I hope you will be patient with me as well!). **Your physical and mental health is always a priority.** Please stay in communication with me so that we can work together to find solutions to any issues that may arise this quarter.

The American Political System: Winter 2022 Course Agenda

Below is the tentative schedule for this quarter. Please note that this course agenda is subject to change. If a change is made, I will send you an email and update the syllabus on Canvas.

WEEK 1 – Getting Started

Wed., Jan. 5 – Introduction & Class Overview

- *Recommended Reading:* McClain, Paul D., Gloria Y. A. Ayee, Taneisha N. Means, Aleicia M. Reyes-Barriénte and Nura A. Sediqe. 2016. “Race, power, and knowledge: tracing the roots of political science in the United States.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. 4(3):467-482.

Fri., Jan. 7 – Strategic Reading Workshop

- No readings; come prepared to engage in the Strategic Reading Workshop with Emily Spracklin, WWU Teaching & Learning Librarian

***DUE on Canvas: 1) Class survey 2) Sign up for four “Hot Seat” days**

WEEK 2 – Defining American Democracy

Mon., Jan. 10 – Democracy in Crisis? (No Quiz)

- Mettler, Suzanne and Robert C. Lieberman. 2020. *Four Threats: The Recurring Crises of American Democracy*. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, Ch. 1: “Threats to Democracy”
- Norris, Pippa. 2021. “It Happened in America. Democratic Backsliding Shouldn’t Have Come as a Surprise.” *Foreign Affairs*. January 7.
- **Podcast (optional):** [“The Fight for a True Democracy.”](#) 1619 Project.

Wed., Jan. 12 – The Founding (No Quiz)

- *The Declaration of Independence*. July 4, 1776. National Archives.
- *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* July 5, 1852. Speech delivered by Frederick Douglass.
- **Podcast (optional):** [“Framed.”](#) *Constitutional*.

Fri., Jan. 14 – Federalism (No Quiz)

- Federalist No. 39
 - Selin, Jennifer. 2020. “How the Constitution’s Federalist Framework is Being Tested by COVID-19.” *Brookings Institution*. June 8.
 - Echohawk, John E. 2013. “Understanding Tribal Sovereignty.” *The Native American Rights Fund*.
-

WEEK 3 – Elections & Participation

Mon., Jan. 17 – NO CLASS – MLK Day

Wed., Jan. 19 – Political Knowledge and Participation (Quiz 1)

- Weaver, Vesla, Gwen Prowse, and Spencer Piston. 2019. “Too Much Knowledge, Too Little Power: An Assessment of Political Knowledge in Highly Policed Communities.” *The Journal of Politics*. 81(3):153-1166.
- Aytac, S. Erdem and Susan Stokes. 2018. “Americans just set a turnout record for the midterms, voting at the highest rate since 1914. This explains why.” *The Monkey Cage*, *The Washington Post*. November 20.

Fri., Jan. 21 – Free & Fair Elections (Quiz 2)

- Hajnal, Zoltan, Nazita Lajevardi, and Lindsay Nielson. 2017. “Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes.” *The Journal of Politics*. 79(2):363-379.
- Weiser, Wendy R., Daniel I. Weiner, and Tim Lau. 2021. “How to Fix American Democracy.” *Brennan Center for Justice*. January 20.

WEEK 4 – Political Institutions

Mon., Jan. 24 – Congress (Quiz 3)

- Fenno, Richard F. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Boston: Little, Brown, Ch. 1: “Perceptions of the Constituency”
- Curry, James M. and Frances Lee. 2016. “Congress is far more bipartisan than headlines suggest.” *The Monkey Cage*, *The Washington Post*. December 20.

Wed., Jan. 26 – The Presidency (Quiz 4)

- Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*. New York: The Free Press. Excerpt: “The Power to Persuade”
- Azari, Julia. 2017. “Trump is a 19th-Century President Facing 21st-Century Problems.” *FiveThirtyEight*. August 28.

Fri., Jan. 28 – The Judiciary (Quiz 5)

- Hemel, Daniel. 2021. “Can Structural Changes Fix the Supreme Court?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 35 (1): 119-142.
 - Curry, Todd A., Michael P. Fix, Michael K. Romano, and Michael F. Salamone. 2020. “Unlike the Supreme Court, state courts have responded quickly to the pandemic. Here’s why.” *The Washington Post*. May 11.
-

WEEK 5 – Political Representation

Mon., Jan. 31 – What is Representation? (Quiz 6)

- Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, Ch. 1: “Introduction.”
- Conroy, Meredith, Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, and Anna Wiederkehr. 2021. “Women of Color Were Shut Out of Congress For Decades. Now They’re Transforming It.” *FiveThirtyEight*. January 18.

Wed., Feb. 2 – Who’s Represented (and Who Isn’t)? (Quiz 7)

- Dovi, Suzanne. 2020. “What’s Missing? A Typology of Political Absence.” *The Journal of Politics*. 82 (2): 559-571.
- Merchant, Emily Klancher. 2018. “Democracy is in danger when the census undercounts vulnerable populations.” *The Conversation*. March 29.

Fri., Feb. 4 – Complicating & Expanding Representation (Quiz 8)

- Montoya, Celeste M., Christina Bejarano, Nadia E. Brown, and Sarah Allen Gershon. 2021. “The Intersectional Dynamics of Descriptive Representation.” *Politics & Gender*.
- Bateson, Regina. 2020. “How ‘strategic’ bias keeps Americans from voting for women and candidates of color.” *The Conversation*. October 29.

WEEK 6 – Is All Politics Identity Politics?

Mon., Feb. 7 – Identity and Social Movements (Quiz 9)

- Nguyen, Thai-Huy and Marybeth Gasman. 2015. “Activism, identity, and service: the influence of the Asian American Movement on the educational experiences of college students.” *History of Education*. 44 (3): 339-354.
- “The Combahee River Collective Statement.” 1977. *Combahee River Collective*.

Wed., Feb. 9 – Identity and Electoral Politics (Quiz 10)

- Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2012. “Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective.” *American Political Science Review*. 106 (3): 517-532.
- Hong, Jane. 2021. “What the election of Asian American GOP women means for the party.” *Made by History, The Washington Post*. March 8.

Fri., Feb. 11 – White Identity Politics (Quiz 11)

- Lipsitz, George. 2018. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, Ch. 1.
- Jardina, Ashley. 2017. “White identity politics isn’t just about white supremacy. It’s much bigger.” *The Monkey Cage, The Washington Post*. August 16.

***DUE: Final Project Proposal**

WEEK 7 – Parties and Polarization

Mon., Feb. 14 – The Two-Party System (Quiz 12)

- Hajnal, Zoltan and Marisa Abrajano. 2016. “Trump’s All Too Familiar Strategy and Its Future in the GOP.” *The Forum*. 14 (3): 295-309.
- Jefferson, Hakeem and Alan Yan. 2020. “How the Two-Party System Obscures the Complexity of Black Americans’ Politics.” *FiveThirtyEight*. October 6.

Wed., Feb. 16 – Elite Polarization (Quiz 13)

- Masket, Seth. 2019. “What is, and Isn’t, Causing Polarization in Modern State Legislatures.” *Politics Symposium*. July 2019.
- Gunkel, Nicolas. 2018. “Many Republican mayors are advancing climate-friendly policies without saying so.” *The Conversation*. May 30.

Fri., Feb. 18 – Mass Polarization (Quiz 14)

- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Steven W. Webster. 2018. “Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans.” *Advances in Political Psychology*. 39 (1): 119-135.
 - Mason, Lilliana. 2014. “Party polarization is making us more prejudiced.” The Monkey Cage, *The Washington Post*. January 28.
-

WEEK 8 – The Role of the Media

Mon., Feb. 21 – NO CLASS – Presidents Day

Wed., Feb. 23 – The Media and Political Elites (Quiz 15)

- Arceneaux, Kevin, Martin Johnson, René Lindstädt, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2016. “The Influence of News Media on Political Elites: Investigating Strategic Responsiveness in Congress.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 60 (1): 5-29.
- Kellam, Marisa and Elizabeth Stein. 2017. “Trump’s war on the news media is serious. Just look at Latin America.” The Monkey Cage, *The Washington Post*. February 16.

Fri., Feb. 25 – The Media and the Public (Quiz 16)

- Lajevardi, Nazita. 2020. *Outsiders at Home: The Politics of American Islamophobia*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 6: “Improving Mass Attitudes: The Media’s Role in Shaping Group Attitudes and Policy Preferences”
 - Martin, Gregory J. and Josh McCrain. 2018. “Yes, Sinclair Broadcast Group does cut local news, increase national news and tilt its stations rightward.” The Monkey Cage, *The Washington Post*. April 10.
-

WEEK 9 – Democratic Backsliding or Democratization?

Mon., Feb. 28 – Show Me the Money (Quiz 17)

- Kalla, Joshua L. and David E. Brookman. 2016. “Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 60(3): 545-558.
- Masket, Seth. 2014. “‘Fixing’ campaign finance is only making it worse.” The Monkey Cage, *The Washington Post*. May 12.

Wed., Mar. 2 – Eroding Norms (Quiz 18)

- Clayton, Katherine, Nicholas T. Davis, Brendan Nyhan, Ethan Porter, Timothy J. Ryan, and Thomas J. Wood. “Does elite rhetoric undermine democratic norms?” Working paper.
- Azari, Julia. 2018. “Forget Norms, Our Democracy Depends on Values.” *FiveThirtyEight*. May 24.

Fri., Mar. 4 – Backlash and Political Violence (Quiz 19)

- Kalmoe, Nathan P. and Lilliana Mason. 2020. “Most Americans Reject Partisan Violence, But There Is Still Cause for Concern.” *Voter Study Group*. May 7.
- Krook, Mona Lena. 2020. “How sexist abuse of women in Congress amounts to political violence – and undermines American democracy.” *The Conversation*. October 21.
- Musgrave, Paul. 2021. “Political Scientists Turned a Blind Eye to America’s Democratic Failures.” *Foreign Policy*. January 18.

WEEK 10 – Engaging in the American Political System

Mon., Mar. 7 – Implementing Democratic Reforms (Quiz 20)

- Drutman, Lee. 2020. *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Ch. 8: “Designing the Save American Democracy Act”
- Holbein, John. 2020. “Why so few young Americans vote.” *The Conversation*. March 11.

Wed., Mar. 9 – Civic Engagement for a Stronger Democracy (Quiz 21)

- Dominguez, Casey B. K., Keith W. Smith, and J. Michael Williams. 2017. “The Effects of Majoring in Political Science on Political Efficacy.” *Journal of Political Science Education*. 13 (1): 62-74.
- Schrantz, Doran, Michelle Oyakawa, and Liz McKenna. 2020. “Building Political Bases to Make Multiracial Democracy Work.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Winter.
- Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander and Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith. 2020. “Revitalizing Civic Infrastructure at the State Level is Necessary for a Health Democracy.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Winter.

Fri., Mar. 11 – NO CLASS – Extended Office Hours

***Due: Final Project**

WEEK 11 – Finals Week

(No final exam, but **extra credit project reflections are due by Friday, March 18th!**)